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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

(29) M-773

Memorandum of Conversation

APPROVED - CAH-4/21/59

APR 23 1959

DATE: April 16, 1959

SUBJECT: Call by the Federal Republic Defense Minister on the
Acting Secretary

PARTICIPANTS: Defense Minister of the Federal
Republic of Germany, Franz Josef Strauss
Minister Franz Krapf, German Embassy

Acting Secretary Herter
Deputy Under Secretary Murphy
Major General Herbert B.
Thatcher, Chief, MAAG (Bonn)
Mr. Alfred G. Vigderman - GER

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After a preliminary exchange of amenities, at the Acting Secretary's invitation, the Defense Minister commented on the decision of Chancellor Adenauer to offer himself as a candidate for the Presidency of the Federal Republic as follows:

Newspaper speculation that the Chancellor was ill, or that he was driven to his decision by tensions within his own party are wholly wrong. The Chancellor's health remains unbroken and there is no tension between the Chancellor and his party. What happened was that during Easter, after due deliberation, the Chancellor concluded that his physical and mental strength would be too soon exhausted if he remained on as Chancellor. Moreover, if he were to be suddenly removed from the scene the confusion thereby generated would work harm to the interests of his party and his policies. He, therefore, decided to relieve himself of the burden of the Chancellorship.

As President, Dr. Adenauer would be in a position to propose a new chancellor, and to use his moral authority as President to give continuity and stability to his policies. There will, in fact, said Minister Strauss, be no change in the Federal Republic's basic policies resulting from the Chancellor's decision.

As to the Chancellor's successor, only Messrs. Etzel and Erhard are serious candidates. Both are supporters of the Chancellor's foreign policy.

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Erhard is more liberal in economic matters and a proponent of a free trade zone. The Chancellor is for the European Economic Community, and fears that damage would occur to French-German relationships if Erhard's concepts were to be adopted. The Chancellor is therefore "51%" for Etzel to succeed him. The Party and the Bundestag CDU fraction support Erhard, and the Minister gave it as his opinion that Erhard would become Chancellor in the end.

The Minister then expressed his sympathy for Mr. Dulles and the gratitude which the German people owed to him. He remarked on the close personal friendship between the Chancellor and Mr. Dulles and suggested that the Chancellor would no doubt be extremely depressed about the news of Mr. Dulles' resignation.

The conversation then turned to the Berlin crisis, with the Minister remarking that he had been encouraged by Mr. Murphy's optimism on its outcome and expressed the view that Khrushchev would not risk a war over Berlin. The Acting Secretary said that no one wants war, but unless we were willing to go to war, there was a great danger of war which might arise from miscalculations. The Minister pointed out that the concept of disengagement was extremely dangerous. In the end the Germans would slide out of the alliance if any disengagement scheme were put into effect. Moreover, without a solution of the Berlin problem, disengagement concepts were dangerous, since the Russians were in a position to blackmail the West every year. Military solutions without political settlements were worse than worthless. The Acting Secretary said he was concerned about the problem of civilian access to Berlin.

The Minister said the Germans had learned through intelligence sources that Ulbricht had last year been very depressed and had told Khrushchev he could not keep the East German regime stable without support from the Soviet Union. People were constantly leaving the Soviet Zone. Laws had been passed to punish flight from the Zone, including laws which require individuals, under penalty, to denounce others whom they know are preparing to leave.

According to the Minister, Khrushchev has two aims. The first is to break Western influence in Berlin and eliminate the continuing danger that Berlin represents to the Communist cause. The second is to use the Berlin crisis as blackmail to bring about a summit conference. At a summit conference the Soviet Union hopes for bilateral discussions with the United States. Their aim is to isolate the United States from its European allies who in turn, would, in desperation, turn to the Soviet Union.

The Minister thanked the Acting Secretary for the courtesies which had been shown him in the United States, praised the good relationships between MAAG Germany and the Minister of Defense, and remarked on the openmindedness of everyone he had talked to. He concluded by telling the Acting Secretary that the agreement under 144 b of the Atomic Energy Act had been agreed in principle, and that on the general question of the arming of the Bundeswehr with atomic weapons, no important political question really continued to persist in Germany.

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Once the decision had been taken the problem largely disappeared from the political scene. The Germans, the Minister said, were ready to renounce modern weapons, but only in the context of a world-wide disarmament solution (for which there was no real hope) or a satisfactory solution of the problem of European security.

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